



**State of Wisconsin**  
**Department of Public Instruction**  
Elizabeth Burmaster, State Superintendent

\*\*\***NEWS RELEASE**\*\*\*

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

DPI 2005-57

Tuesday, March 29, 2005

CONTACT: Joseph Donovan, Communications Officer, (608) 266-3559

**Burmaster urges Joint Finance Committee to invest in education**

*Educating our children is one of the most important things we do in Wisconsin*

MADISON—Citing the education of our children as a top priority, State Superintendent Elizabeth Burmaster provided testimony supporting much of the governor's proposed 2005-07 spending plan for education during a budget hearing before the Joint Finance Committee Tuesday.

"During the difficult financial times that our state has experienced in the past few years, Wisconsin citizens have repeatedly stated that we must be fiscally responsible and protect our top priorities," Burmaster said. "We have to protect what's most important, and Wisconsin citizens agree that educating our children is one of the most important things that we do."

Burmaster provided information in support of items in the governor's budget that include

- revisions to transportation aid and other provisions of her Advancing Rural Wisconsin Initiative;
- increased aid for the Student Achievement Guarantee in Education (SAGE) program and expansion to additional schools;
- creation of a start-up grant program for 4-year-old kindergarten;
- aid to reimburse schools for services to students with exceptionally high-cost educational needs;
- funding for mentors to support beginning teachers as part of the Wisconsin Quality Educator Initiative;
- increased aid for public library systems and BadgerLink;
- Advanced Placement grants and expansion of gifted and talented programs; and
- increased reimbursement for school breakfast.

Burmaster applauded Gov. Jim Doyle's proposed 2005-07 budget, Assembly Bill 100, saying it "strongly reflects the values of Wisconsin citizens of fiscal responsibility and quality education by balancing the budget, providing a property tax freeze, prioritizing education, and investing two-thirds

(more)

state funding for local schools in fiscal year 2007. The budget provides real property tax relief and eases the tension between property taxpayers and our education system. This proposal provides school districts with a financial safety net and relief from increases in their school property tax levies.” she said. “But, just as important, it reflects a policy statement, a recommitment of the state to support PK-12 education at a level that was not possible in the current biennium.” The increased equalization aid, along with an equalized school levy credit, will help school districts hold down local property taxes, reducing the tax levy by 1 percent in fiscal year 2005 and 0.3 percent in fiscal year 2007.

Burmaster asked Joint Finance Committee members to find additional funding for public library system aid, bilingual-bicultural aid, and special education categorical aid. “We must work to help meet the special education needs of our students by increasing special education aid, and the governor’s budget provides an additional \$12 million GPR in FY 07 for categorical aids. With declining state support for special education services, school districts have no choice but to continue re-allocating funds under their revenue limit from regular education,” she said. State aid for special education costs was about 45 percent in 1994. However, because aid has not increased at the same rate as costs, reimbursement is anticipated to drop to approximately 28 percent in the coming year. The Department of Public Instruction budget request would have increased aid to maintain the current level of reimbursement, about 30 percent of special education costs.

In conclusion, Burmaster stated, “In Wisconsin, we have long understood the importance of putting our children on the path to success early in life. We know that quality education can lead us to the future economic success and security of our state. I look forward to continuing my work with the Legislature, to balance the budget with our shared value to put our children’s education first.”

###